AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of the claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims
in the application.

Listing of the Claims:

Claims 1-48. (Canceled).

Claim 49. (Currently Amended): A process for cleaving a polypeptide comprising
cleaving the polypeptide with an *E. coli* OmpT protease ~~97th amino acid~~ variant <u>consisting of an
amino acid substitution at the 97th position of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 41</u>,

wherein the 97th amino acid from the N-terminus of the *E. coli* OmpT protease ~~97th
amino acid~~ variant is leucine, methionine, or histidine,

wherein the polypeptide comprises a cleavage site that is a peptide bond between [[a]] <u>the</u>
P1 position and [[a]] <u>the</u> P1' position, and

wherein the P1 position is arginine or lysine and the P1' position is:

    (1) serine or alanine when the 97th amino acid from the N-terminus of the *E. coli*
    OmpT protease ~~97th amino acid~~ variant is leucine;

    (2) phenylalanine, alanine, serine, cysteine, or tyrosine when the 97th amino acid
    from the N-terminus of the *E. coli* OmpT protease ~~97th amino acid~~ variant is
    methionine; or

    (3) alanine, valine, isoleucine, methionine, serine, threonine, cysteine, or
    asparagine when the 97th amino acid from the N-terminus of the *E. coli* OmpT
    protease ~~97th amino acid~~ variant is histidine.

Claim 50. (Canceled).

Claim 51. (Currently Amended):   The process of claim 49, wherein the amino acid sequence from [[a]] the P10 position to [[a]] the P3 position ~~consists of~~ comprises only a single basic amino acid or only two or three consecutive basic amino acids.

Claim 52. (Previously Presented):   The process of claim 51, wherein the basic amino acids are arginine and/or lysine.

Claim 53. (Previously Presented):   The process of claim 52, wherein the basic amino acids are arginine.

Claim 54. (Previously Presented):   The process of claim 49,

wherein the polypeptide is a fusion protein comprising a protecting peptide and a target peptide,

wherein the C-terminus of the protecting peptide is the P1 position and the N-terminus of the target peptide is the P1' position,

wherein the fusion protein is produced by expressing a gene encoding the fusion protein in a host cell, and

wherein cleavage of the fusion protein liberates the target peptide.

Claim 55. (Currently Amended):   The process of claim 54, wherein a single basic amino acid or two or three consecutive basic amino acids are situated in the amino acid sequence from [[a]] the P10 position to [[a]] the P3 position.

Claim 56. (Currently Amended):   The process of claim 54, wherein the *E. coli* OmpT protease ~~97th amino acid~~ variant is produced by expressing a gene encoding the *E. coli* OmpT protease ~~97th amino acid~~ variant in said host cell.

Claims 57-58. (Canceled).

Claim 59. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 49, wherein two or three consecutive basic amino acids are situated between the P10 and P3 positions in the polypeptide.

Claim 60. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 59, wherein three consecutive basic amino acids are situated between the P5 and P3 positions in the polypeptide.

Claim 61. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 49, wherein the amino acid sequence from the P5 to P1 positions in the polypeptide is Arg-Arg-Arg-Ala-Arg (SEQ ID NO: 11).

Claim 62. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 49, wherein the amino acid sequence from the P7 to P1 positions in the polypeptide is Asp-Ala-Arg-Arg-Arg-Ala-Arg (SEQ ID NO: 12).

Claims 63-66. (Canceled).

Claim 67. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 54, wherein the target peptide consists of between 22 and 45 amino acid residues.

Claim 68. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 67, wherein the target peptide is adrenocorticotropic hormone (1-24), motilin, or calcitonin precursor.